

WHAT HYSTERIA WILL DO TO A COMMUNITY

Scenes in a Famous Brittany Town When the Real Peace Was Declared.

By LIEUT. GEORGE N. WHEAT.
I didn't know until the night of November 11, 1918, that there was such a thing as a "sacred drunk." I had always thought the two words the antithesis of each other until I saw at least 50,000 men and women—yes, and children, too—reeling and shouting, weeping and singing, dancing and imbibing. They were the men, the women and the children of Brest, or rather Brittany, and the occasion was the signing of the armistice and the ending of the world war.

I enlarged the word Brest into Brittany because when the joyful word of the victory sped like wildfire throughout the province half its inhabitants came by train, by ox cart, by army lorries, by wheelbarrow into the province's principal city. And, just as I qualified Brest into Brittany, I want to qualify the use of the word men in the third sentence.

I should have said the celebrants were the men and women, the women and children of Brittany. For every one of the Frenchmen that I saw in the huge, awing serpentine-like throng of reverent revellers, was part lumber. He had either a wooden leg, a wooden arm, or lacking these, wooden shoes. But he was not the impressive thing of the spectacle, nor were the Americans, French sailors, Portuguese soldiers, with here and there passing working parties of Hun ex-butchers or soldiers. The impressive thing was not the multi-colored uniforms, the colors of the Stars and Stripes, the Tri-color of the Union Jack, not the dresses of the women and children which lent a sort of pathetic background for the other colors. These things only had value in so far as they were the amplification of the spirit of France—the spirit that more than a hundred years ago drove autocracy from its own throne. It was this spirit which pushed the heart of France like hammer blows when the realization came that again autocracy had been defeated and driven from French soil; it was this that made the French people literally intoxicated, but, as I remarked at the beginning, "sacredly so, sacredly drunk." It was this spirit which was the outstanding, impressive feature of the celebration.

Brest, like a large number of places elsewhere in the world, had celebrated the "fall of peace" on November 11. The word had come that afternoon that German peace delegates had entered the French lines and were en route to Marshal Poch's headquarters. The entire population and the thousands of American and French sailors stationed there turned out en masse in the Rue de Siam, the principal thoroughfare of the city, and every whistle in the city and port shrieked out the joyful news. Just as the colors of the Allies were being placed in festoons across the narrow streets of the port came the anti-climax. There was no peace.

When the word came on Monday morning, the 11th, at about half-past eleven o'clock, Brest waited for confirmation. A little after the noon hour the official communiqué issued in Paris confirmed the reality of the overwhelming Hun defeat and surrender. Booming in the air from shore—a prearranged signal—told me and hundreds of other officers and men of the navy that the armistice had been signed.

A little after three that afternoon I stepped ashore under the front of Napoleon III, and was wending my way up the long flight of stairs to the street when the French army, after preventing arms, said with a smile:—"Finis la guerre, Monsieur."

I was somewhat surprised because of the strict discipline in the French army and navy that he would so address me, but I was soon to learn that "Finis la guerre" was the phrase of the day, that "Finis la guerre" was a leviathan, a true token of democracy, that in it admirals and seamen, generals and soldiers, poets and peasants, old men and maidens, young men and matrons were again assured of the freedom of the world and that "Democracy" had not perished from the face of the earth.

"Finis la guerre, Monsieur," "Finis la guerre, Madame!" "Finis la guerre, Mademoiselle!" "Finis la guerre, Mademoiselle!" Oh the joy of that phrase! Say it over to yourself and picture a city of faces wreathed in smiles, see the flags flouting in the breeze, hear the shouts of it in children's voices, the music of it in the features of tired and stricken women, now glad. The silver lining of the dark, war cloud was at last shown. The night of weeping had become the morn of song!

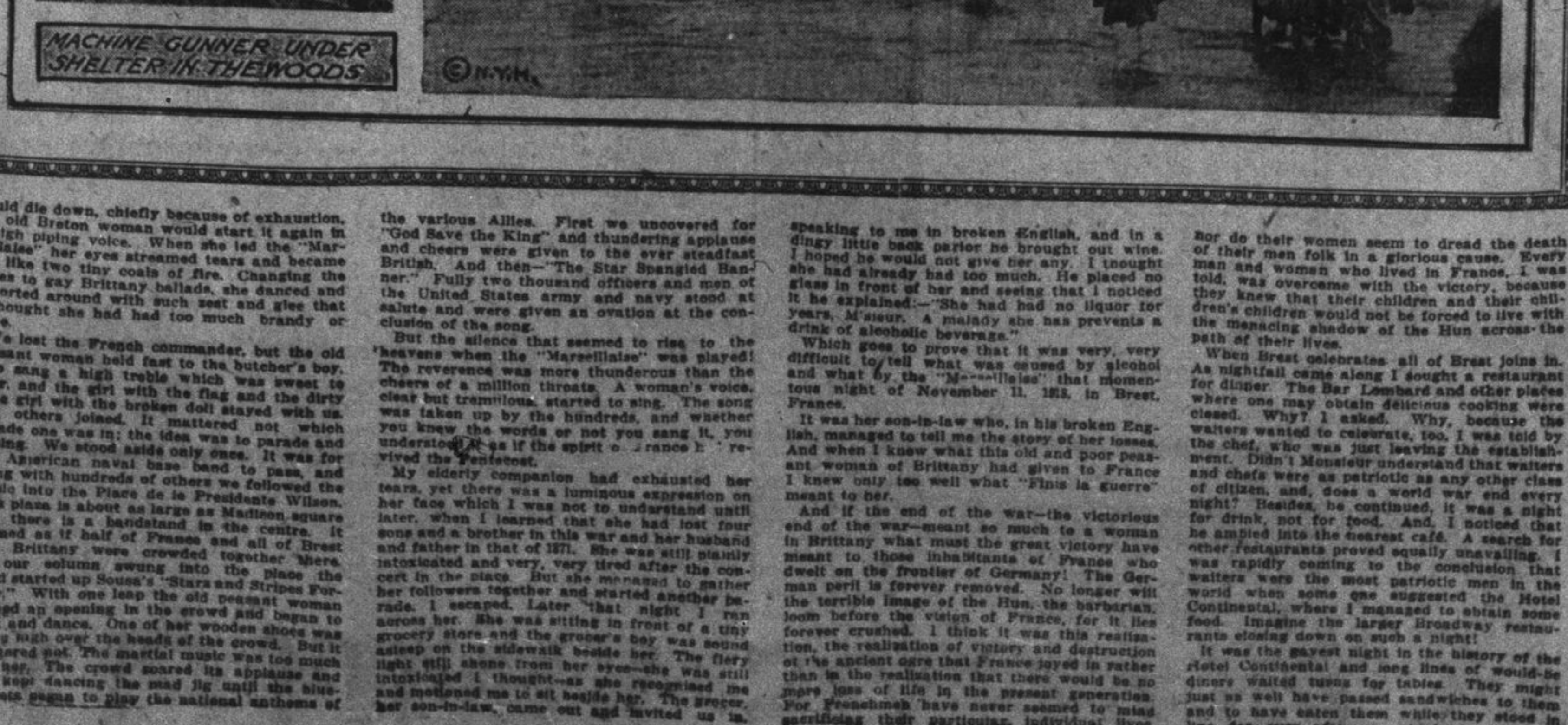
I stood for a brief instant at the head of the stairway leading from the quay, abuzzed by the spirit of joy which is a skin to terror. The spirit of France seized me and I felt hysterical and drunken and despondent—that hymn which none could sing for trembling lips during the dark days. Now it thundered from a thousand throats. I felt as if I were in Florence, when the Vanities were being buried in the Piazza della Signoria, the feast of the autocracy meant the destruction of earth. It was the reality of the thing called joy, the reality of France's relief and gladness that made me feel impotent for an instant to join in so sacred a thing as her celebration at this time.

Those of us in America who have not been to France or England during this great struggle will find it hard to realize what the war has meant to these countries. Picture it if you can—scarcely an unweaned child, scarcely a home unvisited by death. And the end of the tragedy comes—fancy what it means!

"Finis la guerre, Monsieur. Vive the Americans!" This greeting, shouted in French and English (for Brest now speaks a jargon), reminded me that I had left the bridehood and was fighting my way up the Rue de Siam among the people, who despite the ascendancy of the spiritual, were feeling me in very material fashion. I turned and surveyed the person who addressed me. She was an old Breton peasant woman, dressed in the quaint costume of Brittany—short-sleeved lace cap, a bodice reminiscent of the days of the Second Empire, a long red shawl and wooden shoes. She was leading one of perhaps half a hundred impromptu parades which had formed within two blocks of where I stood. On her right arm was a commander in the French navy—on her left a grocer's boy. Over his left arm was a wicker basket and peering over a wicker basket was showing his head. A husky peasant woman with fiery red cheeks and a wealth of black hair down her back had one hand on the basket and in the other she carried a large tri-colored flag. In the second rank, or directly behind the old peasant woman, I saw a tall Moroccan warrior in the uniform of a French colonial, a negro American aviator—perhaps from Genoa, a negro American aviator—perhaps from Genoa, a "golem," a doughboy on crutches, and with one leg gone, three school boys in their quaint smocks and a very dirty little girl with a broken doll.

The old Breton woman seemed to be the leader of this particular parade. As I glanced at her she caught my eye and slightly bowed. She was about to speak when some one started the "Marseillaise."

I took my place between her and the grocer's boy and we began to march. As we went up the principal thoroughfare the crowds got thicker. The café was filled to overflowing and the supply of wine, champagne, liquor and other beverages was rapidly diminishing. Whenever the singing in our particular parade



MACHINE GUNNER UNDER SHELTER IN THE WOODS. FRENCH AND SERBIAN TROOPS ADVANCING. TWELFTH SERBIAN CAVALRY CROSSING THE VARDAR.

Lieut. George N. Wheat, Once a Reporter, Now in the Navy, Gives a Vivid Description.

was a standing proposition, because about every other minute, it seemed, the orchestra would play one of the national anthems of some one of the Allies. The large dining room was lavishly decorated with the Tri-color, the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes, with here and there an Italian and Portuguese flag. Officers of the American Army and Navy, soldiers of the Portuguese republic, Britishers from England, Ireland, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, French generals, colonels, lesser officers and soldiers all mingled in the celebration at the hotel. They had ladies with them, and many a French woman appeared that night in evening dress for the first time since the late fall of August, 1918. After dinner there was dancing, French men and women dancing for the first time since the war started.

There were scores of dances given in other parts of Brest that night. A large number of Red Cross nurses stationed in nearby hospital gave a dance to the American soldiers and sailors. The army Y. M. C. A. and navy Y. M. C. A. huts were also thronged all during the evening, and singers and vaudeville artists from Great Britain and the States added to the entertainment.

Perhaps one of the most pathetic and yet enthusiastic of the celebrations was that of the Franco-Prussian war veterans. Scores of these old men who had been at Sedan and Metz, had prayed a prayer of fervent thanks that they had been permitted to live to see the triumph of the Tri-color over Prussianism. I heard that a band of about a dozen of them agreed to proceed to Metz to watch the triumphal procession of the French soldiery into Alsace-Lorraine. I hope that they succeeded in witnessing such a historic sight.

I talked to one of these veterans. He had been a private soldier in the entourage of the defeated and captured French Emperor.

"You Americans have been our salvation," he said to me. "Had you not come into the war when you did I fear we would long since have lost heart, and when a Frenchman loses heart he loses all. It is only our temperance which has made us stick the war out so long. I wish the American people could be in France tonight to see our gratitude and to receive our thanks. I fear many of them will never truly know what victory means to us. One must have been in France during the terrible days following Sedan and the even more horrible days following the entry of the Boche into France during this war to really appreciate what peace with victory means to us. I was at Sedan and with our Emperor when he was captured. Perhaps they treated him courteously enough, but those of his suite were subjected to terrible insults and to imprisonment in Coblenz in medieval dungeons. I slept in a cell which had an inch of water in it all the time. Then I was freed, but a hopeless cripple from rheumatism."

Then came this war. I lived near Rheims in that section which the Boche took. One of their shells killed my wife, my two sons, my dead and a niece killed herself rather than submit to the will of the Hun commander."

As he came to this point in his recital the old man's face became hard and little glints of hate darted from his eyes.

"I hope they will not make peace, but invade Germany," he continued. "You may wonder why I am in Brest? Because they would not let me fight, so I came here to help make munitions. I work in a factory with many of those splendid girls who are crowding the place. Ah, monsieur, if you could only know some of the stories they have to tell. Most of them in the factories about here are refugees from the North of France, from the invaded districts. But the stories of atrocities, of the indignities to our women are so well known and so commonplace that I dare say none of those girls would tell you what they have gone through. But those of the world who did not live in France must know these things. Most know what a relief we are having on this blessed day to appreciate how the French nation feels over a victorious peace. The German ogre has passed forever."

I asked the veteran how it came that he spoke such good English and he explained that he had lived in England since the end of the Franco-Prussian war. His name is Francis Villard, and I hope he has come back to Rheims and that some good American has helped him rebuild his home in the devastated area. I have taken him as a typical case and have quoted him at length to show the spirit which pervaded Brest on November 11, 1918.

There were many amusing stories of the celebration to be told the following morning, and not the least was the one which went the rounds concerning a party which a few young American naval officers tendered to some Britishers in the same branch of the service. The Americans lived in a typical French pension or boarding house, and to avoid the crowd in the public dining room, arranged to have the dinner served in their apartments. As a special honor, the master who kept the boarding place gave to them for very best wine glasses and decanters provided they would promise to take an extraordinary good care of them. Unfortunately the opening toast at the dinner was to King George, and the officer proposing it forgot for the moment the custom in the British navy of breaking the glasses and chafers with the victor's glasses. He immediately after the toast to Allah in his glasses, and perhaps her head, and she was mollified by the suggestion.

Another story which caused roars of laughter among the army and navy crowd at Brest was that of the negro stevedore sergeant, who topped off the celebration by joining the Mohammedan religious. This particular Mohammedan, George Jackson from Georgia, started the celebration with two African gentlemen from French Morocco and after a couple of quarts of cognac the fact that the preacher and he spoke African made no difference whatever. There is a Mohammedan mosque in Brest where the Moroccan troops worship and where, it is said, there were prayers to Allah in thanksgiving for the victory. George Jackson went to this thanksgiving meeting and then returned and embraced the Mohammedan faith. George was detailed as a striker for a very well known army officer in Brest, and when he told his superior what he had done the officer said: "Good gracious, George! Aren't you afraid the good Lord will take vengeance on you for becoming a heathen?"

The negro scratched his head—"The den of the Holy Roller churches in de States and I see thought I'd try this here new kind, so I went up after the service and told the preacher by signs that I wanted to 'fin'." he said. "But I guess I better investigate and see what I 'fin'."

The story goes that that night the officer again questioned the negro. "I've decided to remain a Mohammedan," the latter said, in reply to a question. "I've investigated and I like the Mohammedan church."

"What do you like about it?" the officer queried.

"I likes der wives and der home arrangements," he replied with a grin.

Save the Plover, Farmer's Friend

Lovers of birds and farmers are alarmed at the wholesale destruction of plovers, the most useful birds of all those that are known in America. Agricultural districts for years have been ruthlessly destroyed by these winged friends of the farmer, and there is danger now that the plover is on the verge of extermination. Hope is given by the fact that the Federal law for the protection of migratory birds will make it possible to prevent the extermination of the plover, and friends of the bird urge that the season be fixed to continue the entire year.